

VZCZCXRO9960
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHAR #1029/01 1291258
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 091258Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4384
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 001029

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/04/2017
TAGS: [GH](#) [NI](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: GHANA ON NIGERIA'S ELECTION

REF: ACCRA 934

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PAMELA E. BRIDGEWATER FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The GOG has largely remained quiet about the recent elections in Nigeria. President Kufuor urged &extreme restraint⁸ at one point but has said little else publicly. Most Ghanaian contacts want to accept the outcome and move on, hoping that elections will improve next time. Close personal ties between Presidents Kufuor and Obasanjo and strong bilateral economic ties help explain the official Ghanaian response, but perhaps more important are concerns about the impact on Ghana of potential instability in Nigeria. While Ghanaian contacts are not overly worried about a flood of Nigerian refugees at the moment, every Ghanaian we spoke to expressed fears that instability in Nigeria has the potential to create a serious refugee problem for Ghana which would strain infrastructure and government services. End summary.

¶2. (C) Ghana,s relations with other West African countries is guided by &good neighborliness.⁸ In practice this means cooperation and support for stability while at times quietly encouraging democratic change. This policy has clearly guided the GOG's response to the recent Nigerian elections. President Kufuor limited his public remarks to initial calls for &extreme restraint⁸ and news coverage was similarly restrained (reftel).

CLOSE PERSONAL TIES

¶3. (C) Ghana and Nigeria have had ups and downs in their relations, but have been very close in the past seven years. This close relationship began when President Olusegun Obasanjo assisted President Kufuor financially in the 2000 election campaign. Kufuor,s gratitude was evident at his inauguration in 2000, when he made Obasanjo the guest of honor. More recently, Obasanjo was the guest of honor at Ghana,s Golden Jubilee celebration in March 2007. During the Jubilee events, Kufuor also bestowed Ghana,s highest award on Obasanjo and renamed a major thoroughfare after him.

¶4. (C) Shortly after Kufuor,s 2001 inauguration, he visited Nigeria. At this point, Ghana,s cash reserves were perilously low and Obasanjo stepped in to help relieve this burden. Since then, Nigeria has assisted Ghana in numerous tangible ways. Two recent examples include Nigeria,s agreement to assume Ghana,s responsibilities for providing power to Togo and Benin, and its offer to sell energy and oil to Ghana at less than market prices. In a recent meeting with poloff, Nigerian DCM in Ghana Abdul Salisu highlighted the personal ties between the two presidents, who he said refer to each other as &brothers.⁸ He said Nigeria,s president-elect plans to visit Ghana in May.

¶5. (C) Two leading experts on Ghana and Nigeria told poloff that these close personal ties are a primary reason Ghana has

accepted Nigeria's election outcome. Dr. V. Antwi Danso, a Political Science professor at the University of Legon, said that Kufuor does not want to embarrass Obasanjo by criticizing the elections. Professor Kwame Boafo Arthur, also of the University of Legon, pointed to Obasanjo's long financial support of Kufuor and the NPP as a leading reason for Kufuor's decision not to be critical of the elections.

REGIONAL STABILITY PARAMOUNT

¶6. (C) Concerns for regional stability also help explain Ghana's stance. As many here like to say, "when Nigeria sneezes, Ghana catches a cold." Ghanaians have memories of the large numbers of Nigerians who came to Ghana in the 1960s (many of whom were later expelled). Given their historical, linguistic and ethnic ties, Ghanaians expect they would once again be a major destination for any potential flood of Nigerian refugees. According to C. Nii Amon Cortey, Supervising Director of the African Union and Africa at the Foreign Ministry, instability in Nigeria could cause a possible flood of refugees that would overwhelm infrastructure and social services. Other Ghanaian contacts have suggested this could even threaten the stability of the GOG if it were large-scale. Despite these concerns, the Chair of the Ghana Refugee Board Emmanuel Owusu told Poloff that he is not very worried about a possible influx of Nigerians at the moment, acknowledging that this could change if there is an upsurge of violence.

STRONG ECONOMIC TIES

¶7. (C) Economic ties are also strong between the two

ACCRA 00001029 002 OF 002

countries. Nigeria is Ghana's leading trading partner. In 2005, Ghana's imports from Nigeria totaled nearly \$900 million, 80 percent of which was oil. Ghana exported nearly \$34 million in products to Nigerian markets in 2005, mainly cocoa and textiles. Since 2005, several Nigerian banks have opened and are prospering in Ghana. Global Telecom of Nigeria is pursuing investments locally. The Nigerian DCM expects these economic ties to grow, especially with the West Africa Gas Pipeline, which will pump Nigerian natural gas to the region starting in late 2007. Any unrest in the "powerhouse" of the region, as Deputy Foreign Minister Akwasi Osei-Adjei called Nigeria, could seriously disrupt Ghana's economy.

PDP WOULD HAVE WON ANYWAY

¶8. (C) The Nigerian opposition's failure to openly challenge the election right away reportedly reinforced Ghana's stance. Ben Ephson, the Managing Editor of the Daily Graphic newspaper, is convinced that if the opposition had been more vocal early on, Kufuor would have likely taken a more critical stance. Professor Danso had similar views, but opined that the PDP would have won anyway, even without the fraud.

&LET'S MOVE ON8

¶9. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Akwasi Osei-Adjei recently told Ambassador that all sides must "move on," especially given the complexity of holding elections in Nigeria. Osei-Adjei said calling for new elections and/or nullifying the previous election returns could invite trouble. He added that he thinks President Kufuor has been in touch with the President-elect. Professor Danso echoed these concerns, saying it was too much to expect a smooth election in Nigeria, especially given its history of corruption and military rule. He pointed out that Ghana's first election in 1992 was seriously flawed and that, like Ghana, Nigeria's

elections should improve over time.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Ghana clearly has a special relationship with Nigeria and has a great deal at stake in Nigerian stability. It is not surprising that Kufuor was not more openly critical of the election process. As indicated reftel, Kufuor's call for "extreme restraint" was an uncharacteristically proactive initial public position. While he genuinely supports democracy and has been willing to intervene in some regional problems, he is generally cautious by nature and prefers wielding influence behind the scenes. Like many Ghanaians, he may also fear that the GOG would have difficulty dealing with the potential economic and refugee implications of an unstable Nigeria.

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